



HOW OLD HOLLY CAME TO BE

Patrick Rothfuss

In the beginning, there was the wood.

It was strong wood, and old. And it grew beside a stream, by a tower all of stone.

There was warm sun, which was good. There were climbing vines, which were bad. There was wind, which was neither. It merely made leaves turn and branches sway.

There was also the lady. She was neither. She came to the tower. She turned the earth and made a garden. She cut the other trees and burned them in the tower.

But the holly tree she did not cut. The holly grew and spread its branches in the open space. And that was good.

There was summer, which was warm. There was winter, which was cold. There were birds, which were neither. They built nests and sometimes sang.

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There was also the lady. She was neither warm nor cold. The holly grew beside the stream, its branches spreading dappled shade.

The lady sat beneath the holly reading books. She climbed the holly, peering into nests. She leaned against the holly, napping in the dappled shade.

These things were neither. None of them were warm or cold. None of them were good or bad.

There was day, which was light. There was night, which was dark. There was the moon, which was both light and dark.

There was a man. He was both. He came to the tower. He and the lady sat beneath the holly. They were both beneath the holly. They were both.

The man said to the lady. The man showed to the lady. The man sang to the lady.

The man left the tower. The lady left the tower. They both left the tower. Both.

The garden grew. The garden, left untended, changed. The garden grew and changed and then the garden was no more.

The tower did not grow. The tower, left untended, did not change. The tower did not change and stayed.

The holly grew. It did not change. It stayed.

The lady came to the tower.

She cut a branch of holly for a wreath, which was bad. She rooted up the climbing vines and tore them from the branches, which

was good. She turned the earth and made a garden, which was neither.

She sat beneath the holly reading books and wept. She sat beneath the holly in the sun and wept. She sat beneath the holly in the rain and wept. She sat beneath the holly and the moon and wept.

These things were neither.

She sat beneath the holly and she sang.

She sat beneath the holly and she sang.

She sat beneath the holly and she sang.

The Lady sat beneath the holly, which was good. The Lady wept, which was bad.

The Lady sang, which was good. The Lady left the tower, which was bad. The tower stayed, which was neither.

The holly changed, which was both.

The holly stayed. There was a stream, which was beautiful. There was wind, which was beautiful. There were birds, which were beautiful.

The Lady came to the tower, which was good. She turned the earth, which was good. The Lady sang, which was beautiful. There were tomatoes, and the Lady ate them, which was good.

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The Lady sat beneath the holly reading books, which was beautiful and good.

There was sun and rain. There was day and night. There was summer and winter.

The holly grew, and that was good. The Lady sat upon his gnarled roots and fished, and that was good. The Lady watched the squirrels play among his leaves and laughed, and that was good.

The Lady turned her foot upon a stone, and that was bad. She leaned against his trunk and frowned, and that was bad. The Lady sang a song to holly. Holly listened. Holly bent. The Lady sang and branch became a walking stick, and that was good.

She walked and leaned on him, and that was good.

The Lady climbed into the highest reaches of his branches, looking into nests, and that was good. The Lady pricked her hands upon his thorns, and that was bad. She sucked the bright bead from her thumb, and slipped, and screamed, and fell.

And holly bent. And holly bent. And Holly bent his boughs to catch her.

And the Lady smiled, and that was beautiful. But there was blood upon her hands, and that was bad. But then the Lady looked upon her blood, and laughed, and sang. And there were berries bright as blood, and that was good.

The Lady spoke to Holly, which was good. The Lady told to Holly,

which was good. She sang and sang and sang to Holly, which was good.

The Lady was afraid, and that was bad. She watched the water of the stream. She looked into the sky. She listened to the wind, and was afraid, and that was bad.

The Lady turned to Holly. The Lady laid her hand upon his trunk. The Lady spoke to Holly. Holly bent, and that was good.

The Lady drew a breath and sang a song to Holly. She sang a song and Holly burrowed deep into the earth. She sang a song and all along the stream there sprung new holly from the ground. She sang and all around the tower climbed new holly. She sang and up the tower grew new holly.

The Lady sang and they were both. Around them both there grew new holly. New holly spread and stretched and wrapped the tower. New holly grew and opened groves of leaves against the sky. She sang until no tower could be seen, and that was good.

The Lady stood beside Old Holly, smiling. They looked out at their new-grown holly grove, and it was good.

Old Holly stood beside the stream and watched the land below. He stood beside the edge of his new grove and felt the earth below and knew that it was good. He felt the sun upon his leaves and knew that it was good.

The wind brushed up against him. The wind was bad. He bent. He bent his boughs against the tower window.

The Lady came to stand beside him. She looked upon the land below. There was a hint of smoke upon the sky. Far away were shapes that moved across the hills.

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There were great black wolves, with mouths of fire. There were men who had been bent halfway into birds. They were both, and bad.

Worst of all there was a shadow bent to look as if it were a man. Old Holly felt the ground beneath the last grow sick, and try to pull away.

The Lady stepped behind his trunk. She was afraid. She peered out at the land below. The shapes came closer, which was bad.

Old Holly bent. Old Holly bent toward the Lady.

The Lady looked at him. The Lady looked upon the land below. The Lady laid her hand upon his trunk, and that was good. The Lady asked. Old Holly bent again.

The Lady sang. She sang Old Holly. She said to him. She said her words. She said.

Old Holly bent and he became a man. He was both, and it was good.

The Lady sang, new holly bent and it became a spear, and it was good.

Old Holly bent his boughs and took the spear. Old Holly stretched his roots and strode across the stream. Old Holly struck the wolves and pinned them to the earth. He bent his boughs and brought another spear. They bit at him, and that was neither. He clutched the men bent into birds, and pulled at them, and tore them all apart.

And last there came the shadow thing, and it was bad. When it moved across the ground he felt the earth attempt to crawl away. It sickened and it shrank away from contact with the shadow thing.

Old Holly bent his boughs again, and brought a spear, its wood of living green. Its blade as bright as berry blood. This he drove into

the shadow thing, and held it to the earth, and watched it howl and burn and die, and this was good.

Old Holly came back to the tower, and it was good. The Lady smiled and sang to him, and it was good. The Lady looked upon his wounds. She wept, and sang to them, and then he bent, and that was good.

The Lady said that she must leave, and that was bad. She said she would return, and that was good. She said that it was dangerous, and Old Holly stretched his roots to stand across the stream.

The Lady shook her head. She said to stay. She said to stay here with the tower. She said to keep it safe for her return.

Old Holly stretched his roots until he stood beside the tower. His Lady went inside. She came outside. She said goodbye.

Old Holly bent, and from a branch, he made for her a walking stick of green wet wood. Old Holly bent, and from his boughs, he wove a crown for her, all bright with berry. Old Holly bent, and as he was a man, he brushed her cheek with his own bark-rough hand.

The Lady wept, and laughed, and left. And that was both and neither and all and other.

Old Holly stayed. The tower stayed. Old Holly stayed beside the tower. Old Holly all around the tower.

Old Holly stayed, and that was good.

The summer left.

The winter left.

The garden left.

Old Holly stayed, and that was good.

The bones of the wolves left.

The roof of the tower left.

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The glass in the windows left.

Old Holly stayed, and that was good.

The stream left.

The tower left.

Old Holly stayed.